

CHURCH WORK IN "DARKEST ENGLAND."— (Continued from page 2.)

one more must be mentioned which is as strange as it is rare. It is held on Thursday evening at 8 o'clock, and the passing stranger, should he chance to enter the church, will see a sight he will not easily forget. He must not expect to get a seat, however, for, like Marks, the slave-hunter, in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' he is not wanted there. For the building on that particular night is sacred to the female sex, who not only occupy all the benches, but overflow into the supplementary chairs that have to be requisitioned. And what is it that attracts all these women on a weekday night? It cannot be that which is supposed to have such a peculiar fascination for the softer sex—a marriage—for the hour precludes such a possibility. Neither is it a grand function, for the altar is not lighted up, and the choir is empty. It is simply and solely a Bible-class conducted by the vicar for their special delectation, and it is a proof at once of the power of the old, old story to attract and of the vicar's ability in expounding it, that the Church is thus filled by interested learners every Thursday evening, save for a short hiatus in the summer season, all the year round. This, it will be admitted, is something like a Bible-class.

The services and classes we have mentioned, however, by no means exhaust the list of agencies for reaching the people. In fact, it is quite impossible, with the space at our command, to do much more than enumerate them. The system of working is to go her the people into mission rooms for various classes,—laborers, costermongers, scavengers, men, women and children—each calling and phase of life being dealt with by itself. Beginning with the Mission of Costermongers, who form the bulk of the population, it is gratifying to learn that at the time of writing the last report, 130 men had had their names enrolled, of whom about two thirds were in weekly attendance, and this very gratifying result may well prompt the vicar to say that it is a very dear consolation to know that the rule of the priest is stronger than the ruling of the magistrate, and that it saves the pocket of the British ratepayer from many a pound which would be charged for their maintenance at Her Majesty's prisons. Those who have not yet been gathered in are appealed to in various ways, notably by a large poster which anyone may see at this present time adorning the walls of the district, urging them, in large type, to leave their barrows outside, and concluding by advising them, 'not to go home for a wash,' but to come in just as they are. Then there is the Young Costermongers' Mission for boys about the age of sixteen. This is a very difficult class both to catch and to retain, but out of it the missionaries manage to get a very respectable percentage of boys who are prepared for Confirmation, and who, by this means, so change their mode of life, that, to use the vicar's words, 'they become wells in shiny black on Sundays.' But, he adds, he is just as happy as if they attend their Communion and mission meetings, and keep to street work, for 'it is better that they should witness for Christ at their barrows in the streets of London than turn printers' boys or warehouse young men. The coster boy is larky, but it is all above board.' As to all the other missions in this hive of Christian industry we can but make running comments on their principal features, for, happily, they are too numerous to be described in full. The chief speciality, then, of the Calvary mission is the fifth refuge for women, which is managed by Sister Teresa; the Nazareth Mission is a perpetuation of the old Manger Mission; the Children's Mission is a supplement to the Sunday schools; the Total Abstinents' Mission numbers 360 members, which is a very good number considering the fact that, as the report says, 'poverty is a bitter opponent to

temperance . . . for if a man is out of work an old pal will give him something to drink, but he won't give him the money to buy food, and so the pledge is broken'; the Band of Hope numbers over 600 children; the Communicants' Guild has 880 members; the Young Men's Guild is specially intended to help on the newly confirmed by keeping the young men and big boys up to their religious duties; the Boy's Guild is for little fellows before Confirmation, after which event they are transferred to the Young Men's Guild; the title of the Young Women's Guild explains itself, but it seems that even when the girls leave to get married they cling to the Church, and come long distances to be churched and to have their babies christened—a fact which we have observed so often in other so called Ritualistic Churches that it may be said to be a speciality; the Girls' Guild numbers over 289, and the members at the age of fifteen are transferred to the Young Women's Guild; the Sunday schools contain 1,500 children; the Christian day schools are for those who go to board schools (for the parish is as yet unprovided with a properly built national school) and the scholars assemble after the board school is over at 12 o'clock in a room in the parish, and at the present time there are 400 on the books, with an average attendance of 300; the Working Men's Club is composed of the 200 men who attended the before-mentioned Sunday morning Bible-class in the Church; the Costermongers' Club is simply a plain room (there are no funds for a more attractive one) for the men who belong to the Costermongers' Mission, in order to keep them from the public house and from loafing about the 'thievish corners of the streets'; the Young Costermongers' Club is established in order to provide a comfortable and healthy resort for these lads, as a substitute for the penny gaffs, etc.; the Home for girls, which is under the supervision of Sister Agatha, at 181 Blackfriars road, is a permanent dwelling for girls who go to work, and contains about twenty or thirty young women; the Working Girls' Lodge is intended to attract girls after leaving their factories to spend the evenings in the club rooms. It also provides sleeping accommodations for such girls as may be out of service, etc., but, unlike the Home for Girls, is only meant as a temporary abode; the Creche and Infant Nursery is another valuable institution, both for the mothers who leave their babies to be cared for, and for the babies themselves, who would otherwise be left 'in charge' of an inattentive brother or sister; the Children's Kitchen has fed a good many thousand children during the last fourteen years; the same may be said of the Poor Man's Restaurant and Shelter; and the Mothers' Meetings and Clothing Fund, etc., etc., almost complete the sum total of the good works performed in this now well-cared for parish. We say almost, for we have left a notable institution to the last because it deserves a more lengthy mention than would be possible in the mere enumeration given above. This is the Working Boys' Home, whose object is to rescue boys who, having no homes and no real parents, are in danger of falling into vicious habits. What these are, all who know the temptations which poor, homeless, outcast lads are exposed to, can realize without much particularizing. Amongst these are the betting rings of their courts or lodging-houses, the penny theatre, with its vile company, and the public house. To supplement and accentuate all these evil influences, when the poor boy lays down on the dirty sack of straw which is called a bed, at his lodging house, the last words he hears as he falls asleep, and the first that greets him on waking, are oaths and blasphemy. It is to minimize as much as may be these evils that this Home is established.

Notwithstanding the number of institutions we have briefly sketched, we have by no means exhausted the tale of Church work in this par-

ish. It will be sufficient to say that they are so numerous that were a total stranger to be planted in ever so remote a corner of the district he would have no need to inquire for St. Alphage's Church. It pervades the entire neighborhood, and St. Alphage's this, St. Alphage's that, and St. Alphage's something else meets the eye in every squalid street. The answer to the question, "Where is the Church?" would therefore simply be, *Circumspice*. The building when once found, however, would no more convey to his mind that it sprang from, and was on the very site of, its manger beginning than it did it occur to the Jews of old that out of the Manger of Bethlehem should come the Founder of the mightiest Church ever known in the world's history. Yet in sober fact it is so, and on that side of St. Alphage's Church nearest to the unlovely stable of old is a most superb copy (life size) of Guido Reni's painting of the "Crucifixion." A little incident in connection with this very picture will suffice to show both its fitness for the place and the missionary character of the work in this quarter of so called Christian England. As it was being carried from the van into the church, several very rough people standing around inquired its meaning, and on being told were much affected, and exclaimed, "Oh, what a shame to treat a poor man so!"

To do all this missionary work there are but three priests, three laymen, ten sisters, and the students of the Southwark Theological College (another institution in connection with the Church, the members of which render valuable service), and it is therefore not at all surprising to read in the report a formidable list of "Our Wants." As a sample of these "wants" may be a useful lesson to some of those good people who imagine that High Churchmen are always thinking of candles and incense and ornaments generally, we subjoin a few. For instance, living agents are not generally required for ornaments, but a great many are wanted here for use, and this is one of the vicar's pressing wants. Neither can the craving on his part for £1,000 a year to do the spiritual work of the mission generally, fairly come under the head of æstheticism. Then he wants more still annually for corporal work, i. e., maintenance of homes, food and clothing for the poor, rents of premises, etc. Not satisfied with this, like Oliver Twist, he wants more still—to build premises for philanthropic works, and to build a vicarage and clergyhouse. And the smallest sum of all he wants is for that which is supposed so exclusively to occupy a High Churchman's attention—viz., the completion of his church. To sum up, we think we have said enough in this sketch to prove that St. Alphage's is another of those churches where Catholic doctrine goes hand in hand with hard work, and reverent ritual with spiritual activity.

In 1611, an English gentleman traveling in Italy made this entry in his journal: 'I observe a custom not used in any other country. They use a little fork when they eat their meat.' He purchased one and carried it to England, but when he used it he was so ridiculed by his friends that he wrote in his diary: 'Master Lawrence Whitaker, my familiar friend, called me Lucifer for using a fork at feeding.' That little twotone article of table furniture brought about a fierce discussion. It was regarded as an innovation, unwarranted by the customs of society. Ministers preached against its use. One minister maintained that, as the Creator had given thumbs and fingers, it was an insult to Almighty God to use a fork.

A Subscriber in Nova Scotia remitting renewal subscription for another year, and with an additional new name writes: 'I wish I had more to send you. The paper is invaluable to Churchmen and women, and should be in every family.'